

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 5667

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SP
SUBJECT: GOVT DIALOGUE UNDERWAY WITH BASQUE PROVINCES

REF: MADRID 5339

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. A COMBINATION OF GOVT RESTRAINT AND
RESPECT FOR PUBLIC ORDER IN THE BASQUE PROVINCES HAS
CREATED A BETTER CLIMATE FOR NEW GOVT'S PROGRAM IN THE
AREA, PARTICULARLY ON ISSUE OF REGIONALISM. END SUMMARY.

2. AMCON BILBAO REPORTS THAT PUBLIC ORDER IN THE BASQUE
PROVINCES FOR THE PAST WEEKS HAS BEEN MARKED BY THE ABSENCE
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OF VIOLENCE CAUSED BY SEPARATIST GROUPS, MAINLY THE

FACTION RIDDEN ETA, AND GOVT PERMISSIVENESS IN ALLOWING DEMONSTRATIONS FOR POLITICAL AMNESTY, BASQUE NATIONAL COMMEMORATIONS, AND INCREASING USE OF LOCAL GOVT ORGANS TO ARTICULATE LOCAL DEMANDS. ONLY ONE INCIDENT HAS MARRED THIS GENERAL OBSERVATION: ONE WOMAN WAS KILLED BY UNKNOWN SHOTS FIRED DURING A SCUFFLE INVOLVING CIVIL GUARD AND DEMONSTRATORS NEAR BILBAO, JULY 10. OTHERWISE, THE LARGEST AUTHORIZED PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION (100,000-150,000) IN RECENT YEARS WITH ANTI-GOVT OVERTONES WAS HELD IN BILBAO JULY 8 (REFTEL). FROM THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE SO FAR THE ETA WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE JULY 17-18 WAVE OF BOMBINGS.

3. MANY OFFICIALLY APPROVED PUBLIC ACTS WERE HELD THROUGHOUT THE BASQUE PROVINCES OF GUYPUZCOA, VISCAYA, AND ALAVA JULY 21 COMMEMORATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ABROGATION OF THE SPECIAL BASQUE "FUEROS" (RIGHTS OR PRIVILEGES). IN VERGARA, SITE OF A HISTORICAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CENTRAL GOVT AND CARLISTS ENDING THE LAST CARLIST WAR, APPX 25,000 DEMONSTRATORS REPRESENTING SOME 77 BASQUE MUNICIPALITIES DEMANDED REINSTATEMENT OF THE "FUEROS". IN OTHER CITIES-- BILBAO, ZARAUZAA THERE WERE SMALL DEMONSTRATIONS, SOME AUTHORIZED OTHERS ILLEGAL AS IN THE CASE OF THE AFOREMENTIONED DEMONSTRATION IN BILBAO THE POLICE REPORTEDLY DID NOT INTERFERE IN THE AUTHORIZED DEMONSTRATIONS, ALTHOUGH THEY RAPIDLY BROKE UP THE ILLEGAL ONES. FORMER MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AREILZA, A BASQUE, SENT A MESSAGE OF SUPPORT TO THE VERGARA ORGANIZERS LEB BY THE MAYOR.

4. THE LOCAL REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES (DIPUTACIONES) OF THE THREE BASQUE PROVINCES HELD EXTRADINARY SESSIONS JULY 21 TO APPROVE UNANIMOUSLY IN EACH CASE RESOLUTIONS WITH THE COMMON DEMAND FOR THE ABROGATION OF THE 1876 LAW WHICH DID AWAY WITH THE "FUEROS". THE RESOLUTIONS CONTAINED A PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE KING, AND, IN THE CASE OF ALAVA PROVINCE, EXPLICIT SUPPORT FOR THE NEW GOVT'S PROGRAM. THE RESOLUTION ADOPTED IN VISCAYA PROVINCE MENTIONED THAT THE BASQUE PROVINCES WOULD HOLD CONFIDENTIAL

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A SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION IN GUERNICA--THE SACRED BASQUE CITY--JULY 30 COMMEMORATING THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SWEARING OF AN OATH BY KING FERDINAND TO UPHOLD THE BASQUE "FUEROS".

5. COMMENT: THERE HAS BEEN MUCH TALK ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE KING MIGHT MAKE HIS NEXT VISIT TO THE BASQUE PROVINCES AFTER HIS FORTHCOMING VISIT TO GALICIA. THE

ARIAS GOVTS DID TWO THINGS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THESE PROVINCES, (1) A LAW ALLOWING THE USE OF BASQUE--AND OTHER MINORITY LANGUAGES--IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS, AND (2) APPOINTMENT OF A COMMITTEE TO PREPARE A DRAFT OF A NEW ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CENTRAL GOVT AND THE BASQUE PROVINCES. ALTHOUGH AREILZA'S CREDIBILITY WITH BASQUES WAS PERMANENTLY DAMAGED BY HIS YEARS AS FRANCO'S MAYOR IN BILBAO (1939-41), HIS BASQUE SUCCESSOR IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, OREJA, HAS A SOLID POLITICAL BASE IN GUYPUZCOA PROVINCE AND IS IN A POSITION TO PLAY A GO-BETWEEN ROLE BETWEEN THE BASQUES AND THE GOVT AND PERHAPS THE KING. LOCAL BASQUE LEADERS ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY ASSERTIVE IN OPEN, LEGAL FORA AND, IN THE CONTINUED ABSENCE OF VIOLENCE, COULD EXERT INCREASING INFLUENCE ON HOW THE NEW ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONSHIP IS DRAWN UP. SEVERAL CHANNELS FOR A GOVT-LOCAL GOVT DIALOGUE EXIST AND ARE BEING USED. THE IMPROVED ATMOSPHERE FOR A REASONABLE DIALOGUE HAS BEEN HEIGHTENED BY GOVT TOLERANCE AND THE APPARENT SIGNAL FROM THE BASQUES THAT THEY AR PREPARED TO GO ALONG WITH THE GOVT'S REFORM PROGRAM PROVIDING THAT IT INCLUDES A MEANINGFUL RETURN TO SOME FORM OF SPECIAL ARRANGMENT FOR THEM.

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